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Plans for three additional conference rooms and viable solutions for allowing natural light into the rooms

Report of the Secretary-General*

Summary

The present report is submitted in response to General Assembly resolution 57/292, section II, paragraphs 9 and 10, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to "submit to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session plans for the three additional conference rooms foreseen in the baseline scope, including the information used to determine the need for such additional space and the size of each room", and "to include in those plans viable solutions for allowing natural light into the rooms, with a view to ensuring occupationally healthy conditions". The report should be read in conjunction with the interim report of the Secretary-General on the capital master plan (A/57/285 and Corr.1).

The present report outlines possible options for the three additional conference rooms foreseen in the baseline scope. The General Assembly may wish to offer its views on these options so that they are reflected in the design development.

* The preparation of the report was delayed owing to the need to complete consultations within the Secretariat.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 57/292 of 20 December 2002, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit plans for three new conference rooms, including the information used to determine the need for that additional space and the size of each room. It also requested the Secretary-General to include viable solutions for allowing natural light into the rooms with a view to ensuring healthy conditions.

2. Over the course of the development of the capital master plan and planning for the future locations of major functions, possibilities have arisen for better utilizing existing space. Among these is the possibility of creating three new mid-sized conference rooms on the first basement level of the Headquarters building, which was identified in the capital master plan report submitted to the General Assembly in June 2000 (A/55/117 and Add.1). The existing broadcast and conference engineering facilities on the first basement level of the General Assembly building are technology-intensive spaces and are required to remain operational throughout the implementation of the capital master plan. The most cost-effective way to create the appropriate environment for modern broadcast and conference engineering is to create a new facility within the complex and to relocate this function to that new facility. The relocation will result in the release of the existing space for other uses.

3. As a result of the expansion of membership from the originally anticipated 70 Member States to 191, the Organization's increasing interaction with non-governmental organizations and civil society, and the need for the funds and programmes to use conference facilities, it was recognized that new conference rooms would be an appropriate use of available space to meet current and future requirements of the Organization. Three new mid-sized conference rooms have been included in the proposed scope of the capital master plan. The new facilities would include both conference rooms and supporting spaces (interpretation booths, lobby and entry spaces, support offices and mechanical rooms).

4. The projected budget for the capital master plan is $1,049 million, plus or minus 10 per cent, including $6 million for the cost of creating the new conference rooms, with all costs related to the design, construction and furnishing of the rooms, the support spaces and associated mechanical systems included.

II. Basis for new conference rooms

A. History and principles

5. During 2002 and 2003, there has been a shortage of rooms for both calendar and ad hoc meetings. For meetings of calendar bodies only, in the first 30 weeks of 2002 and of 2003 there were shortages of 13 and 18 weeks, respectively, in respect of medium-sized and/or small rooms. During the main parts of the sessions of the General Assembly, there was a general shortage of rooms, including large rooms, even though no subsidiary organ of the General Assembly is allowed to meet at that time. During the rest of the year, the demand for medium-sized and small rooms exceeded availability most of the time.

6. For intergovernmental meetings, the deficit is mostly in medium-sized rooms for informal consultations and drafting groups, an essential part of the

intergovernmental process. The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management is often unable to meet the demands of such bodies. In addition, it is often impossible to accommodate the ongoing requests from permanent missions and United Nations organizations, including specialized agencies, as well as other requests for Secretariat departmental meetings, training seminars and events hosted by departments.

7. The changing nature of the deliberating process of intergovernmental organs has led to an increasing demand for medium-sized rooms for round tables, briefings, meetings of regional and other major groupings, extended bureaux, etc. Many such meetings have to be held in large or small rooms, although during periods of high volume, such as during special conferences and the regular or special sessions of the General Assembly, there is sometimes a shortage of these rooms as well. Holding a meeting in a larger than ideal room can be just as disadvantageous for the purposes of the meeting as holding it in a far too small room.

8. The rigidity of the seating arrangements in the existing rooms limits their utility and further complicates the assignment of appropriate rooms (both in size and in seating arrangement). This is especially troublesome in the case of high-profile meetings such as round tables attended by heads of State.

B. Future requirements

9. In the light of the foregoing, the Secretary-General continues to believe that three additional medium-sized rooms would make optimum use of the available space. In order to accommodate the wide range and variety of needs, one of the rooms should be able to seat 100 at table, in classroom style, and the other two up to 60. The latter rooms should be easily combinable, including their sound systems. Flexible seating is also essential in these two rooms, and would be desirable also in the third room.

III. Introduction of natural light

10. The new conference rooms will be bound on the south, west and a portion of the east by existing corridors on the first basement level (see annex). The corridor on the south side, which connects the Conference building and the General Assembly building, is a bottleneck for circulation in the first basement and is normally the location of conference exhibits and displays. For this reason, major exits and entrances to the new conference rooms should not be placed in this location. By contrast, the east and west corridors are underutilized and therefore could handle the additional load created by the introduction of the new conference rooms.

11. The existing basement structure is a concrete-encased steel frame with spans varying in length from 28 feet (8.5 metres) to 62 feet (19.2 metres), with areas densely occupied by columns and open, column-free space. The relocation of columns or major beams would be difficult and expensive, whereas the structure lends itself to being modified between framing members (including openings) without extensive shoring and reinforcing. The exterior wall can also be opened between columns without reinforcement.

12. Additionally, the existing floor of the broadcast facility is lower than the general floor elevation by 2.3 feet (0.7 metres). This offers the opportunity for higher ceilings in the new conference rooms and level access to the interpretation booths.

13. A security risk and threat assessment of the General Assembly and Conference buildings resulted in a recommendation to the effect that all openings in the structure of the building in this area facing east will require ballistic protection.

14. Two components can be combined to optimize the distribution of natural light. The first component is the introduction of openings in the existing structure to enable light to enter the conference rooms and the adjacent spaces. Both wall window openings and roof skylights were considered. The second component is the introduction of interior finishes and/or light diffusers inside the new conference rooms to control the distribution of the light.

15. *Windows*. Openings on the east wall of the facility would be facing the rose garden. These windows would provide a high level of natural light to the new conference rooms. Although for security reasons no conference rooms would open directly to the exterior, the east walls would be translucent, allowing light to enter. This light would be controlled by a passive (e.g., drapes, shades or blinds) or active (e.g., mechanical blinds) system.

16. *Skylights*. The extent to which skylights can be used to provide light in the new conference room area is limited by the layout and perimeter of the buildings above them. Approximately one third of the ceiling area is suitable for the introduction of skylights. Two options for skylights were studied, one in which they would be raised off the ground and the other a system of translucent horizontal paving panels.

17. The installation of either skylight alternative will require interior finishes that distribute and diffuse light throughout the rooms. This is particularly important because it is not possible to locate the skylights across the entire ceiling space. To promote an even distribution of light, either a system of reflectors or a ceiling system of baffles and filters would need to be installed to modulate the brightness of natural light to within the range of interior light.

18. Heat gain from added skylights and window walls would be considered in the design of the mechanical systems. It is not expected that this additional load would have a significant effect on the overall cooling or heating load in the space, and it therefore would not have any significant cost impact on mechanical systems. Skylights would be insulated and have energy-efficient coatings, as required by codes. The mechanical systems for this area would be independent from the rest of the building.

19. Care would be required to ensure that glare was minimized in the conference rooms. To control the light coming into a room, an array of measures would be necessary. The design would require such light control equipment as baffles, deflectors, filters and adjustable blinds. These features would be designed into the skylights themselves and into the general configuration and finishes of the rooms.

20. All new or modified wall and roof areas would be reinforced, connections would be designed, and glazing and skylights would be selected. Skylights would be fitted with diffusing glass so that there would be no direct views into the conference rooms. Windows opening to the conference rooms would be similarly protected.

21. The function of the rooms requires the ability to present information through a variety of media, many of which will require varying degrees of darkness. To that end, it is required that the light-control equipment be capable of blocking the light.

IV. Layout options for the conference rooms

22. In planning the layout for the new conference rooms, four criteria were used: (a) the requirements defined in paragraphs 9 to 13 above; (b) optimization of natural light for the conference and gathering spaces; (c) minimizing impact on pedestrian circulation flow; and (d) overall cost. Three options have been analysed as follows:

Option 1: lobby along east corridor

23. Although this option allows for the delegate spaces (the conference rooms, lounge and circulation areas) to be located in the area adjacent to the rose garden, where the best opportunities exist for the incorporation of windows, it locates the entry to the conference area at the connecting corridor between the General Assembly and Conference buildings (the "neck"), complicating the first basement circulation and limiting the addition of skylights to three of them in the larger conference room only.

Option 2: conference rooms rotated at an angle

24. This option locates the primary entries into the conference area from the east and west corridor, minimizing any potential circulation problems from the "neck" area. In addition, it aligns the conference rooms with the structure above, permitting the addition of nine skylights (covering approximately half of the two smaller conference rooms and all of the larger one). It reduces the area obstructed by the columns within the conference rooms and interpretation booths.

Option 3: lobby along west corridor

25. This option locates the conference rooms at the eastern edge of the space. It allows for the addition of 13 skylights (covering the entire area of each conference room) and eliminates any column obstructions. However, this location does not permit windows on the east wall. This scheme also differs from the other options in that it locates the entry, lounge and circulation areas along the west corridor.

26. All three options have the potential for the addition of skylights, to varying degrees. Window openings can be added in options 1 and 2. The additional cost of including windows along the east wall and translucent panels in the conference rooms would be $552,000. The cost of installing one raised and one flush-mounted skylight would be $210,000 and $83,000, respectively. The cost for each skylight includes all additional costs related to the interior finishes within each conference room.

Table
Additional costs of introducing the maximum practical amount of natural light into the conference rooms
(Millions of United States dollars)

Lighting alternatives	*Option 1*	*Option 2*	*Option 3*
Windows	0.5	0.5	Not possible
Skylights			
Flush	0.2	0.7	1.1
Raised	0.6	1.8	2.7
Total range (includes maximum number of skylights and windows)	**0.7-1.1**	1.2-2.3	1.1-2.7

27. Of the two skylight types, flush skylights are recommended. Flush skylights are visually less obtrusive and easier to harmonize with the existing architecture. They are also less costly than raised skylights.

28. Since the other costs of the various options are similar, the natural light alternatives presented are the only cost variable. Depending on the option and the method of diffusing the natural light, the costs for introducing natural light through flush skylights, with windows where feasible, range from $0.7 million to $1.2 million.

V. Conclusions

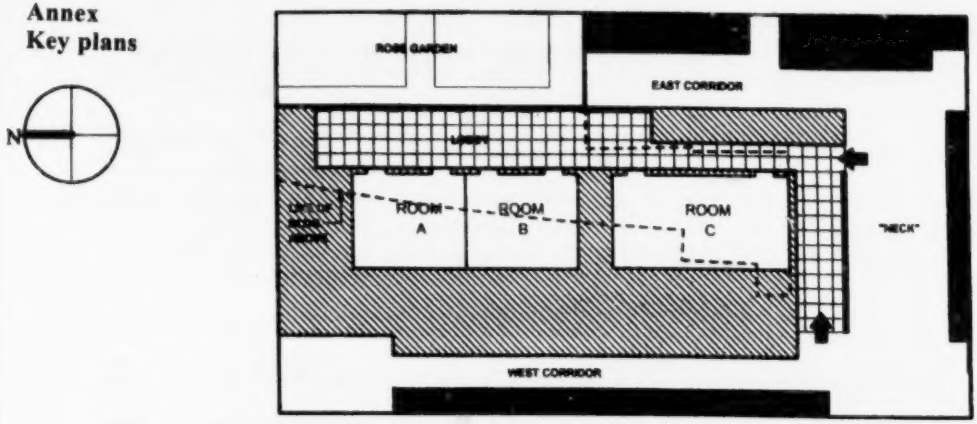
29. **The basis for the proposal to create three additional conference rooms and the specific requirements for each room have been re-examined. On the basis of recent demands and future trends, one larger conference room with a seating capacity of 100 delegates and two combinable smaller conference rooms with a seating capacity of 60 delegates each will be required in the future.**

30. **Natural light can be introduced into the new conference rooms through skylights or, in options 1 and 2, through windows. The introduction of natural light would increase the cost of the rooms by $0.7 million to $1.2 million, depending on the scheme selected.**

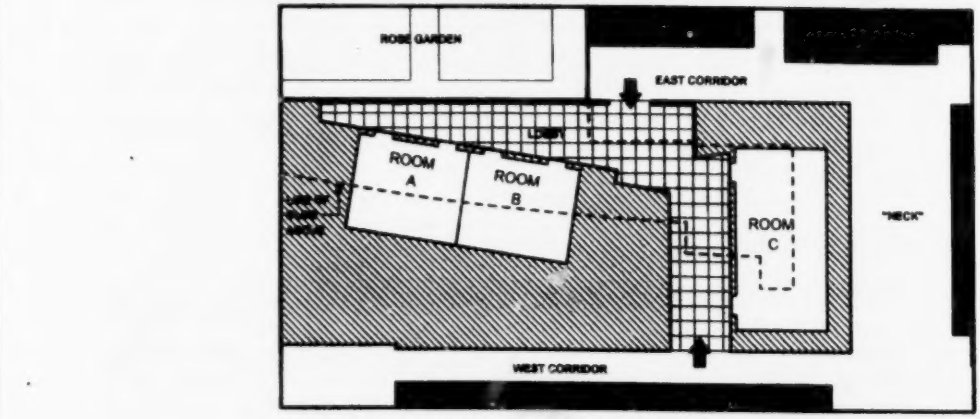
31. **Options 2 and 3 fully satisfy the basic criteria. These options will be pursued in the design development work of the capital master plan. During the confirmation phase of design development, it will be necessary to select a single option. The decision to include construction options to introduce natural light into the conference rooms will be subject to the overall cost of the refurbishment of the General Assembly building as a whole, while remaining within the budget at subsequent phases.**

32. **The General Assembly may wish to take note of the information contained in the present report and offer its views on the information herein so that they are reflected in the design development.**

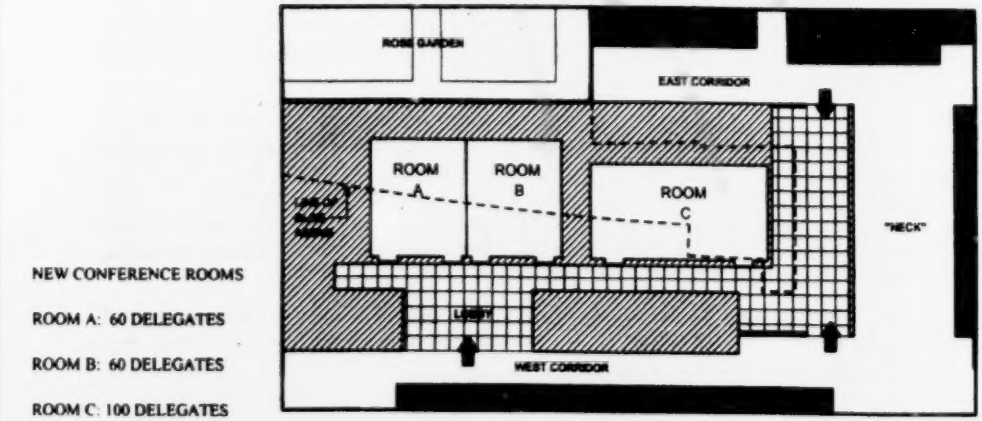
Annex
Key plans



OPTION 1: LOBBY ON EAST CORRIDOR



OPTION 2: CONFERENCE ROOMS ROTATED AT AN ANGLE



OPTION 3: LOBBY ON WEST CORRIDOR

NEW CONFERENCE ROOMS

ROOM A: 60 DELEGATES

ROOM B: 60 DELEGATES

ROOM C: 100 DELEGATES